

New medical places are not what the doctor ordered

Doctors have responded with 'cautious optimism' to a State Government plan to develop a medical training program in Central Queensland and Wide Bay to address the shortage of doctors in regional and rural areas.

The plan, announced in Rockhampton on Wednesday by Health Minister Steven Miles, would enable medical students to complete their entire medical degree in the region.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland Councillor and Chair of the Medical Schools Taskforce, Dr Bav Manoharan, said doctors welcomed the involvement of existing Rural Clinical Schools rather than the development of new medical schools in regional areas.

"We do not support the creation of new medical schools in Australia or in Queensland, however, innovative partnerships between existing local universities and Rural Clinical Schools is a good thing because it enables doctors to study, train and work in the region," he said.

"Our cautious optimism comes from a concern that the redistribution of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) for medical students from cities to the regions will increase capacity in metropolitan universities to enrol full-fee paying students. Certainly, there will be a financial incentive to do so."

Dr Manoharan said AMA Queensland did not support an increase in new medical student placements.

"There has been large increase in the number of medical student places over the past decade without a commensurate rise in capacity by the health system to train those extra doctors coming through, causing a bottleneck of junior doctors trying to become fully qualified specialists," he said.

"AMA Queensland will work closely with the State Government to ensure the adverse consequences of increasing student placements continue to be front of mind while working towards improving the more urgent issue of the distribution of doctors across regional and rural parts of the state."

Dr Manoharan also said any solution to the doctor shortage in regional and rural areas needed to address the workplace culture issues that were reflected in the AMA Queensland 2018 Resident Hospital and Health Check, a report card on the working conditions at Queensland Hospitals.

The report highlighted the need for significant commitment and action by Hospital and Health Services in improving workplace culture, especially in those areas experiencing difficulty retaining and recruiting junior doctors.

"Enhancing training programs, research and further educational opportunities along with making positive cultural changes to medical workplaces would lead to increased retention and a greater ability to recruit doctors to regional areas," Dr Manoharan said.

"We need to encourage our medical graduates to transition to local employees."

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